

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 29, 1885, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L Grand Union Hotel, New York, Monday, Nov. 29th, (?) 1885. My darling Mabel:

I have just had a great fright of rather an amazing character. I was very tired after my long walk yesterday and after dinner felt so sleepy that I went to bed. I expected to wake up in the middle of the night — refreshed and bright — when I determined to write to you and revise the Academy Report so as to have it ready to submit to President Barnard this morning at ten o'clock.

I slept soundly — very soundly — for I only awakened about half an hour ago and what time do you think it was? I pulled the alarm of my watch expecting to find it about 2 o'clock in the morning. To my horror the watch kept on striking— 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10 — 11 — and a half. Good heavens! Could it be half-past eleven in the morning? I jumped out of bed and pulled aside the portiere that separates my bedroom from the little parlor where I am now and there was day-light streaming in through the crevices of the closely shuttered window ! Wasn't it mortifying? Though there was no one to see — I blushed scarlet as I thought of President Barnard and the Academy Report. But another surprise was in store for me. I threw open the window and found it was night — and that the light streaming in proceeded from an electric lamp. Isn't it too delicious for anything? Midnight instead of noon! And there's time for Pres. Barnard's Report and your letter too.

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“[???” as the Harvard students say!

As I have just got up I feel it appropriate to adopt the civil reckoning of time and date this letter “Monday morning” — although had it not been for my nap this evening — no —

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yesterday — I should certainly have gone over to Prof. Newcomb's side and have dated it "Sunday night." It certainly does seem strange to say — as I can truly — that the fright I experienced half an hour ago happened yesterday instead of today! But "to return to our mutttons" — I want to tell you about my visit to Brooklyn. After a careful examination of the Directory and consultation with the hotel clerk — I had no difficulty in finding my way to Pineapple Street where Dr. Radcliffe's brother lives. I was rather surprised at the appearance of the house from the outside. I always had the idea that Dr. Radcliffe's family were poor — but this house is certainly beyond the limits of an empty purse.

A handsome door with stained glass panels forms a pre-possessing entrance to what appears to be an Apartment House or Hotel — let in suites of rooms. The character of the house is revealed at once by the row of locked letter-boxes on either side of the door — each one bearing on the drop-lid the name of the occupant of one of the suites. The house reminded me so much of the Edinburgh "Flats" that I almost expected to see the door open mysteriously by itself in true Edinburgh style. The apartments have a "common stair" and entrance but beyond this the likeness to the Edinburgh plan ceases. The arrangements are more Parisian than Scotch. There's a sort of Concierge who has a room or office at the foot of the common stair. I can't tell what sort of a woman she is for the hall was so dark that I could not distinguish her 3 features. She took my card upstairs and when she returned told me to go up to the third floor and turn to the left. The "common stair" was by no means in keeping with the exterior of the house and was a very common affair indeed. But the apartments were a surprise. Small but handsome and luxuriously furnished. Quite out of keeping with any idea of extreme economy. And the man was a surprise (Dr. Radcliffe's brother "Jacob") — a slight man — smaller than the doctor — thin as a living skeleton — and so delicate looking as to appear in the last stages of consumption. (This is not what surprised me for I have seen him before) — It was his dress — a perfect swell — I never saw anything like it off the stage. Your Uncle Eusti? couldn't hold a candle to him. My first impression was that he was in full evening dress (and his sister at death's door in the other room !) — This idea gave me quite a shock but a closer inspection showed that

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I was mistaken. There was the open vest certainly — and the immaculate shirt front and studs — and white tie carefully tied in a tiny bow. But the outer garment was a dressing-gown or jacket reaching down to the hips — apparently of silk with lapels and lining of pink or lilac satin or silk. The trousers also were not of broadcloth but of some checked or striped material — but the feet — the small and delicate feet — tiny as a girl's — were encased in silken cocks and dancing slippers. From top to toe there was not a spot or speck of dust. Every hair upon his head appeared to have been carefully placed in its proper place. A perfect swell — a dapper little man.

The apartments were elegantly and luxuriously furnished — everything in its proper place — not a speck of dust to be seen anywhere.

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Everything — his surroundings and his attire — were consistent with liberal means and a good income but utterly inconsistent with cramped means and forced economy. I don't know what to think of it all but fear that this young man must be living beyond his means in which case there is trouble ahead.

His sister — Reba — has been dangerously ill — but what the trouble is — I am not informed excepting that it is not typhoid fever.

Mr. Radcliffe said that he had written fully to his brother — the doctor — who would understand about it. She is now considered out of danger. For some days past she has been occasionally delirious — or at least did not recognize her brother but is quite clear now. She heard that I was there and wanted me to go in and shake hands with her — so I did — but her room was so dark that I could not distinguish her features. She lay on her back in bed with some sort of jacket or wrapper on. She spoke to me in a feeble voice — thanked me for coming to see her — and asked after the doctor and the children. Of course I did not remain but simply shook hands and left wishing her a speedy recovery of health and strength.

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While I was talking with Mr. Radcliffe — in his study — or office — or library — or whatever it may be — there was a knock at the door of the apartment — and Mr. Radcliffe called out and asked “Lu” to open it. A young man, who was afterwards introduced to me as Miss Radcliffe's betrothed came out of her room and answered the door. The visitor proved to be a Mr. Suni — an Armenian.

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I am sorry I did not know at first that Miss Radcliffe was engaged to be married to this young man. I would have taken a good look at him and have tried to remember his name. I did not know of it till just as I left. He appeared to me to be quite young and had a very English appearance. He looked as if he might be a nice fellow and looked healthy and well. The nurse they have engaged — had just gone out for a walk when I appeared. I asked Mr. Radcliffe to write a telegram to his brother which I could send. In this he said “Lewis” says that Reba is out of danger or something to that effect. He explained that his brother would understand that “Lewis” was the doctor. I wonder whether the young man he called “Lu” who is engaged to Miss Radcliffe is also her medical attendant! If so I should think he must only be a medical student — he looks so young. In any case it must be a great comfort to the poor girl to have her lover with her at this time and I am sure I wish them both every happiness.

Mr. Radcliffe says his sister is undoubtedly improving and is out of danger. After leaving the house I walked across Brooklyn Bridge to the Western Union Telegraph Office to send telegrams to you and Dr. Radcliffe — and then walked up Broadway as far as 14th St. and Union Square and took dinner at Riccadonna's Italian Restaurant. After dinner I continued my walk to 42d St. and this hotel and tumbled into bed.

There you have got my whole story and a long letter — but I won't tell you how long it has taken me to write it — and the Report waits.

With much love.

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Your affectionate husband, Alec. Mrs. A. Graham Bell, Scott Circle, Washington, D. C.